

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENTTO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

It is requested that special care may be taken to
ensure the secrecy of this document.

198

S E C R E T.W.P.(40)148(Also C.O.S.(40)329).COPY NO. 23WAR CABINET.ARUBA AND CURACAO: PROTECTION OF OIL REFINERIES
IN THE EVENT OF A GERMAN INVASION OF HOLLAND.Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.Significance.

The Dutch West Indian Islands of Aruba and Curacao are of great strategic importance on account of the large oil refineries which deal with the bulk of the output of Venezuelan oil, the supply of which is of vital importance to our war effort. The degree of importance of this source of supply would be considerably increased in the event of the Mediterranean route being closed.

H.M. Consul at Willemstad has reported that the local Dutch Authorities at Curacao are alive to the possibility of the security of the Islands being threatened in the event of a German invasion of Holland. Rumours are current locally that Venezuela has designs on Curacao in that event. Defence precautions are stated to have been re-doubled.

Forms of Attack.

2. The security of the oil refineries in the Dutch West Indies might be threatened by:-

- (a) Sabotage.
- (b) Bombardment raid by armed merchant vessel or submarine.
- (c) Attack by raiding parties from similar craft.

Sabotage.

3. In the light of their recent activities in Scandinavia it seems possible that the Germans may have prepared a comprehensive scheme for immediate sabotage either through the medium of employees in the refineries or by the crews of German ships lying in the harbours. There is also a possibility of internal disturbances being fomented by local pro-German elements. It is understood that the danger is realised by the American element, especially at Aruba, and that anti-sabotage precautions have been taken.

4. The only action that we can take in advance to avert this danger is to warn the Dutch Government to be on their guard. In the event of a German invasion of Holland taking place it would be very advisable to occupy the Islands without loss of time in order to safeguard our important interests. A further advantage of so doing would be that it would enable us to seize the German merchant shipping sheltering in the islands.

Bombardment raid by armed merchant vessels or submarines.

5. All the refineries, being situated on the coast, are vulnerable to bombardment from the sea. The two installations in Aruba, which island is devoid of defences, are particularly exposed, though their American ownership might perhaps be some safeguard. The refinery in Curacao, which is owned by Anglo-Dutch interests, is somewhat less exposed, being situated inside the harbour of Willemstad, which is believed to have some modern 7.5-inch coast defence guns although there is some

doubt whether they have yet been mounted. There are also 2 Dutch submarines and a gunnery instruction ship stationed at Willemstad, the presence of which would afford some protection.

6. The fact that the Islands are situated in the American neutrality zone makes attack by German regular naval surface forces unlikely. The cover provided by the existing Allied forces in the Caribbean, would also afford some protection. Attack by disguised raider or submarine remains a possibility, however, against which the only certain defence would be the installation of coast defence guns, which would take some time. Local submarine patrols would be a useful safeguard and these could probably be provided by the two Dutch submarines on the station.

Attack by raiding parties.

7. We do not feel that this is a likely eventuality, but there is the chance of a raider evading our patrols. A small garrison in each Island would suffice to guard against this threat, as well as the danger of sabotage. The Dutch are believed to have a few marines in Curacao, but Allied control would be necessary to ensure that proper precautions are taken.

Allied Action.

8. We consider that energetic Allied action to ensure the security of the oil refineries in Curacao and Aruba in the event of a German invasion of Holland is highly desirable, and that such action should include

occupation by Allied troops, which, the British Ambassador in Washington considers would be unlikely to offend American susceptibilities in such circumstances. Certain preliminary steps have already been taken on the initiative of the Admiralty.

Force available.

9. The equivalent of three regular infantry companies could be made available at once from Kingston for service in Curacao without prejudicing the present internal situation in Jamaica. They should, however, be replaced as soon as is possible either by raising new local forces or by reinforcements from overseas.

10. The French would be prepared to send a small detachment from the Garrison of Martinique, and for administrative reasons it would be a convenient division of responsibility for the British to occupy Curacao and the French Aruba. The French High Command has agreed to these arrangements, but the concurrence of the French Government has not yet been received.

Co-operation with U.S.A.

11. We agree with the suggestion by the British Ambassador in Washington concerning the participation of the U.S.A., and we accordingly suggest that an invitation to the U.S. Government to share in the control of the Islands should be made concurrently with our occupation, but that no previous warning of our intention should be given.

Recommendations.

12. We recommend that:-

- (a) early action should be taken through diplomatic channels to ensure that the Dutch Government are alive to the importance of guarding against sabotage to the oil refineries.

202

- (b) In the event of a German invasion of Holland local French and British forces should immediately occupy the Islands of Aruba and Curacao respectively.
- (c) The agreement of the French Government to the proposed action should be obtained.
- (d) The general control of the operations should be vested in the Commander-in-Chief America and West Indies Stations.
- (e) The Admiralty should be responsible for initiating the operations when the occasion arises.
- (f) Concurrently with the occupation of the Islands, but not before, a formal invitation to the U.S.A. Government to share in the occupation of the islands be made.

(Signed) DUDLEY POUND.

" J. G. DILL.

(For C.I.G.S.)

" R. E. C. PEIRSE.

(For C.A.S.)

Cabinet War Room.